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ABSTRACT

Finding innovative and effective methods to infer the ability of culturally diverse students continues to present a problem for educators. This paper proposes the House-Tree-Person (HTP) projective technique as a way for school educators to gather important data about student functioning without the use of culturally biased instruments. This technique is intended only as a means of establishing rapport or improving communication between teacher and student. In the HTP, the subject draws a house, a tree, and a person and then tells something about each drawing. Over a period of 10 years, 200 protocols of HTP drawings were collected from culturally diverse subjects aged 5-65. The HTP succeeded in establishing positive rapport with subjects in order to facilitate and assess effective communication. Student comments on their drawings may be used as the basis of teacher inferences about students' social awareness, communication skills, cognitive abilities, knowledge in content areas, and psychological development. Criteria are outlined for each of these areas. Professional ethics and standards concerning classroom use of projective tests are discussed. (SV)

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Using the House-Tree-Person (H-T-P) as a Method to Understanding Individual Cultural Differences Among Children

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Abstract

Finding innovative and effective methods to infer the ability of students with cultural diversity continues to present a problem for educators (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1991). The need to establish rapport and meaningful communication preexists the need to establish vocabulary (academic) levels and levels of psychological functioning. The purpose of this paper is to propose the use of the House-Tree-Person (H-T-P), a projection technique, as a technique for school educators to gather important data regarding student functioning without the use of culturally biased instruments. Categories for data collection and useful criterion marks are presented. Caution is advised for professional ethics and standards regarding classroom use of projective tests.

Need

Educators are confronting complex issues affecting decisions to use assessment data. Meeting the individual needs of all learners requires a sensitive knowledge of the learner's strengths and needs in all educational areas, including the affective domain. Teachers plan, implement and evaluate curriculum based on the learner's cognitive abilities, communication skills, knowledge in content areas, social awareness and psychological development. Concurrent to the demands for those data are the warnings of the consequences and dangers of misuse of tests and measures Salvia & Ysseldyke, (1991).

Standards

Salvia and Ysseldyke (1991) promote the following professional standards for the ethical use of assessment data:

1. Responsibility for the consequences of one's work. The results of an H-T-P assessment may bring about a surfacing or resurrecting of problems of a more serious nature than anticipated.
2. Recognizing the boundaries of one's competence. It is important that professionals regularly engage in self-assessment to be aware of their limitations and recognize the limitations of the tools used in any type of assessment. Results of the H-T-P are not conclusive.
3. Confidentiality of information. Drawings in the H-T-P may arouse associations within the student of a very sensitive nature, regarding his/her home life and experiences, exposing information not otherwise available to the teacher/ counselor.
4. Adherence to professional standards on assessment. There is no state & federal agency that acts to limit the publication or general use of tests. Therefore, it is important to use professional judgment regarding the use of the H-T-P and other assessment instruments.
5. Test security. Teachers/Counselors must maintain test security. It is expected that information obtained in confidence, using the H-T-P, is treated in a professional manner.

It is not intended that the use of this technique as presented, be other than that of a means of establishing rapport, to establish or regain communication between teacher/counselor and student, or as an aid to facilitate interpersonal interaction with students that may result in more accuracy in assessing students needs.

Drawings

Drawings have been used for many years to evaluate the affective domain of children. Generally, children's reaction to formal testing is a high level of anxiety coupled with the constant awareness of passing or failing. The advantage of

projective techniques, as opposed to objective test items, instruments or questionnaires, is the subject's unlimited range of responses. The confinement to the circling of yes or no is eliminated. Projective techniques allow subjects more freedom: this freedom in spontaneous thinking is described as "response free".

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to advance the concept of ethical use of the H-T-P in the classroom. The criteria for the categories of cognitive ability, communication skills, knowledge in content areas, social awareness and psychological development are given (see table 1).

The House-Tree-Purpose was introduced by Buck (1948) using the instructions, "I would like you to draw a house, I would like you to draw a tree, and I would like you to draw a whole person". Subjects are asked to make free-hand drawings, each on an 8 1/2" X 11" sheet of paper, and are given almost complete freedom in the manner in which they perform. Should the protest arise, as often does, of not being an artist, subjects are assured that the H-T-P is not a test of artistic ability. The paper is presented horizontally for the house and vertically for the person and tree. The H-T-P has been demonstrated as a useful and presently substantiated empirical and protocol technique. It is easy to administer, and rapid.

Later research brought a fourth picture, that of a person of the opposite sex (Machover, 1949). Several other authors have since continued to contribute to the research for using pictures as an assessment method (Burns, 1987: Knoff & Prout, 1985). The Kinetic-House-Tree-Person (K-H-T-P), advocated in Knoff and Prout, (1985) requires subjects to draw the house, the tree and the person on one sheet of paper (8 1/2 X 11"). According to Buck (1966), the specific objects of the house, tree, and person were found to be more universally accepted by subjects of all ages than other experimental materials. In addition, these objects appeared to generate richer verbal spontaneity than other objects. After all drawings are completed, the subject is required to tell something about each picture. Haworth & Rabin (1960), commented that subjects experience a reduction of tension and react with pleasure, enthusiasm and feelings of security as it is an activity in which they feel comfortable.

Method

For a period of ten years, 200 protocols were collected of H-T-P drawings from culturally diverse subjects from ages five to sixty five. This instrument was used as a tool in establishing necessary positive rapport with a subject in order to facilitate and assess effective communication. The use of the H-T-P may, however, result in the discovery of more intense problems of behavior that would entail the services of a clinician with extensive training and experience.

Results

The various specific uses of the H-T-P are described as to areas of ability within the curriculum.

Social Awareness: Objects basically familiar to students are presented creating a stimulus from which attitudes are projected: Students have verbalized about appropriate and inappropriate behavior of the people drawn in the H-T-P and made statements both positive and negative about "looks" appearance.

Communication Skills: The H-T-P allows each student to describe/define what he/she has drawn, revealing information about the students abilities to exhibit skills in sequential, detailed, or complete thought processes: Descriptions from students have included information such as orchards in "fruit bearing" season, the progression of the "growing" season, from spring to summer, in response to the drawing of the tree.

Cognitive abilities: A subject may through his/her comments, reveal the fact that he/she has real critical abilities: The verbal description of the house have included structural materials used in building, the method used in "bricking" a house, and the advantages of one type of building material as opposed to another.

Knowledge in Content Areas: Organizational skills and information on cause and effect are indicators of strength in content areas: Students have verbalized, while drawing each pictures, information about the placement of each picture on the page, type of weather condition in the picture, and the effects that weather condition has on the items in the picture drawn.

Psychological Development: Drawings may depict decisiveness, and impetus toward tasks: Students reveal eagerness and delight prior to and during the drawing of pictures, by positioning themselves on the edge of the seat, stretching arms, smiling, and sometimes making such statements as "Now I can draw some pictures", or "Ok!, I like this".

Discussion

Assessment data gained from sources other than the culturally biased instruments traditionally used, increases the level of accuracy of identification of affective and cognitive needs of students with culturally diverse backgrounds. The H-T-P projective technique is unstructured in design and tends to be a less threatening tool of assessment. The use of a tool with this design, eliminates cultural bias, increases the opportunities for identifying cognitive, communicative, and content abilities, provides the teacher/counselor the opportunity to address the need to establish a mutual trust between students and themselves, and brings about multicultural sensitivity so needed in rural areas. The more informed teachers are about their students needs and abilities, the more precise they are in creating a positive, progressive learning environment relevant to a student's instructional and affective needs.

Table 1

Criterion

Categorical Abilities

I. Cognitive Abilities:
   1. Used reasoning for drawing certain types of pictures.
   2. Identified detail in pictures.
   3. Quickness of warm-up.
   4. Responded readily with ideas.
   5. Used comparative terminology

II. Communication Skills :
   1. Responded to questions.
   2. Volunteered additional information.
   3. Elaborated on contents of drawings.
   4. Initiated conversation.
   5. Asked numerous questions.

III. Social Awareness:
   1. Other individuals mentioned in relationship to self.
   2. Responded the importance of self.
   3. Commented on "appropriate" dress of males and females.
   4. Discussed respect of others.
   5. Responded to questions of his/her "place" in family, community, world.

IV. Psychological Development:
   1. Spoke with self-confidence.
   2. Comfortable with authority figure.
   3. Responded freely to plans for the future.

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